

# Stairway to Heaven

By Jon Engum, Master StrongFirst Instructor

On a recent trip to Vicenza Italy I found the perfect set of stairs for training. The stairs lead to the Church of St. Mary of Mount Berico. According to legend the Virgin Mary appeared twice to a peasant worker in the years 1426 and 1428. She promised that if the people of Vicenza constructed a church on the top of the hill, she would save them from the plague. They did and she did. So as you see these stairs are quite literally the staircase to heaven. Find some stairs and enjoy the following:

## The Mount Everest Workout

Stair training is nothing new – coaches have been taking their athletes to the stairs ever since they were invented and before that the hill. For the combat athlete, the stairs offer a unique challenge to the calves and lungs and legs not to mention spirit.

Here is a taste of this hellish training module:

Find a nice set of stairs. 100 steps would be just about perfect, don't get too caught up in it if there is a landing or two interspaced during the rise, it will actually make the training more interesting.

You are to go upstairs as fast as possible doing the specified drill or technique but when coming back down just jog hitting every stair regardless of the method you used to ascend. Come down fast as you safely can.

For clarity sake we will call every trip up the stairs a rep and a group of reps is a set. Because of the effect this will have on your legs and lungs I have affectionately named this training the Mount Everest Workout.

Enjoy the rarefied air.

The Everest workout is broken into 5 levels or to follow the mountain climbing theme, camps. So pack your bags, purify your spirit and prepare to challenge the mountain gods...Good Luck!

## Base Camp

### Step One

Sprint up as fast as possible stepping on EVERY step, comedown as fast as you safely can. Like real mountain climbing most accidents happen on the way down...pay attention!

Make 3 trips up as fast as possible.

If you have a partner he will take his turn which will be your rest. If you are alone try to time your rest to give you a 1:1 work rest ratio. Every exercise on "Everest" will be done this way.

I perform best with a training partner because of my competitive nature -it is fun to try to give him a shorter rest by completing my set faster.

Do 3 sets before you move on to the next "step." Get it, a stair workout...next step. I know, I am truly sorry, it must be the altitude.

## Step 2

Step 2 consists of 3 trips up the stairs only landing on every other step. 3 sets of 3 reps – following the you-go, I-go method as outlined above.

Some people will actually find the double steps easier.  
No worries the ease is about to end!

## Step 3

You guessed it! In step 3 you will be sprinting upstairs only landing on every 3rd step. Use the same program as far as sets and reps. 3×3.

Most people will need to use explosive momentum and really stretch the legs out in order not to stall on the steps. You should move up the stairs like a gazelle not an elephant. Stay light, fast, and elongate. Power up those babies!

There you have it. Just like a real mountain climber you will need to spend some time acclimating to base camp before you push on to the higher levels.

Base Camp debrief.

3 reps x 3 sets of single stairs sprints

3 reps x 3sets double stairs sprints

3 reps x 3 sets triple stair sprints

Once you are able to complete the Base Camp workout at a good clip without coughing up your lunch you have clearance to push on to  
Camp 1.

## Camp 1

Welcome to Camp 1. The work here is piled on top of base camp. It is to be done immediately after finishing base camp in the same session.

## Step 1

3 sets of 3 reps single leg pitching.

Pitching is the term used to describe bringing your knee up to your chest as rapidly as possible.

Note: the knee goes to your chest not your chest to your knee. Keep your upper body tall and quite, hold your head high. Think about “pitching” your front kick. You are rapidly going from the ground to the front kick chamber and then back down again. You will rise up on the ball of your foot when you pitch your kick.

In addition to your knee going up the opposite arm will punch down to cover your open side, i.e. right knee goes up, left arm covers down.

In step 1 you will land on the next higher step after every knee lift (pitch) and then do the other leg. This will get you up the stairs.

Do a normal, safe jog back down. Feel free to hold on to the rail if one is available.

Go as fast as you can making sure to pitch your knee high on each step.

## Step 2

Double Pitch 3 reps x 3 set.

The double pitch is the same as the single pitch but you will perform two knee lifts with the same leg. In other words pitch twice with the right leg and then twice with the left. To make things even more interesting you will land on the same stair after the first knee lift and then the next higher stair after the second knee lift.

Get into a rhythm and fly up those steps.

This is a speed drill like all the rest so move fast.

Camp 2

There is an old country song that goes something like "*two steps forward and one step back*" which will be the theme of Camp 2.

Sprint the stairs again but this time for every two steps up, you must go one step back down.

Work your way up the stairs as quickly as possible.

2 sets X 2 reps

Camp 3

OK you made it to Camp 3.

Time to really blowtorch the calves.

The workout at the Camp 3 level consists of single leg hops up the stairs. Hop up the stairs using only the right leg then jog back down, then hop up using only the left leg and jog back down. Make sure to keep your hops light and fast. On this level you will do both legs before you switch with your partners. In other words you need to make a trip up with the right and then another with the left and that will count as 1 total rep.

Do 2 sets of 1 rep total.

Final Summit Attack

The final push for the summit will leave your legs feeling like Jell-O. Be very careful when walking back down the stairs.

Here we go! Assume the low position of the squat and frog hop up the stairs. Keep your back straight and stay low. Try to just jump high enough to clear the next step. Bounce your way to the top  
1 set of 1.

Extra Credit.

Korean Ranger Training

Many years ago during my first training trip to South Korea I was at an outside restaurant eating some noodles and enjoying the scenery. In the distance I could see a mountain. I noticed that every once in a while a man would run up to the top of the mountain and a while later he would run back down the mountain. This went on for sometime, up he went and down he'd come. I asked a gentleman sitting at the table next to me if he knew what was happening.

"Yes. It is Korean Ranger School and the man is a soldier in training. Not only does he have to run up and down the hill but when he gets to the top they beat him up and when we get to the bottom they beat him again."

As you can imagine this made a lasting impression on me and I couldn't wait to implement this in my training. So in honor of this unknown ranger here is an extra credit workout. It may be hard for some of

you to find willing partners to administer the beatings, so we will let the Russian kettlebell take care of that.

Simply repeat the Base Camp workout as outlined above but at the top do 20 kettlebell swings and at the bottom do 20 kettlebell swings.